

Statement of Serge Duss

**Director Public Policy and Advocacy
World Vision**

**On Humanitarian Assistance Following Military Operations:
Overcoming Barriers – Part II**

before the

**Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security,
Emerging Threats, and International Relations**

U.S. House of Representatives

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Thank you Mr. Chairman for allowing me to testify today before your Subcommittee. World Vision, founded in 1950, is the largest privately funded humanitarian aid organization in the United States. We are a Christian relief and development agency serving the world's poorest children and families in nearly 100 countries.

About World Vision

World Vision United States is the American member of an international World Vision Partnership whose humanitarian mission is to work for the well being of poor and suffering people – especially children. World Vision assisted more than 85 million people in 96 nations last year, including disadvantaged youth and families in the United States. In fiscal year 2002, World Vision raised \$1.03 billion in cash and goods from private and public donors. Worldwide, the organization employs about 18,000 staff, 97 percent of whom work in their native countries.

World Vision's relief and development work is community-based, child-focused, and available to those in need, regardless of race, gender, ethnic background or religious belief. To deliver services

effectively, World Vision establishes relationships with community leaders and joins with churches, governments, and other aid agencies whenever possible and feasible.

World Vision in Iraq

While World Vision has worked intermittently in Iraq in the past, it had not been operational in recent years. In anticipation of the war, World Vision pre-positioned supplies and staff in Jordan, Syria, Iran and Turkey and negotiated agreements with the World Food Program, the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Caritas and the Middle East Council of Churches.

Members of World Vision's global rapid response team entered Iraq in late April. Under an agreement with Coalition forces, UN agencies and other NGOs, World Vision assumed responsibility for meeting humanitarian needs in the governorate of Nineva, whose principal city is Mosul, and for Iraqi towns along the highway from Amman to Mosul.

In accepting this responsibility, World Vision anticipates a 12 to 24-month program in Iraq, operating on an annual budget of approximately \$10 million. The program will focus primarily on meeting children's needs for food, health care, education and reconstruction. Funding sources include USAID, the World Food Program, the governments of Japan, Korea, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and private contributions from donors in a dozen developed nations, including the United States.

World Vision's humanitarian operations in Iraq

Since beginning humanitarian operations in Iraq nearly three months ago, World Vision has worked principally in the city of Mosul and in the westerly town of Al Rutba (population 25,000).

In Al Rutba, World Vision has helped restore electrical power; and is working to rehabilitate the primary health care clinic, refurbish 12 heavily-damaged primary and secondary schools, instituting an awareness program regarding landmines and unexploded ordnance, and has assisted 3,200 families with blankets, clothing, shoes, water containers, and plastic sheeting.

In Mosul, World Vision has assisted with the registration and provisioning of internally displaced persons, ensured an adequate supply of essential drugs to the region's 14 hospitals, and rehabilitated 15 primary and secondary schools damaged by war or post-conflict looting. We are planning to rehabilitate an additional 80-90 schools within the near future.

Key points on humanitarian assistance following military operations

I offer these preliminary comments about World Vision and its humanitarian operations in Iraq by way of context for my remarks. Among other things, the Subcommittee asked that I focus my testimony on progress made in achieving the 11 essential tasks outlined by Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Jay Garner in his testimony to the Subcommittee on May 13. Among the essential tasks put forward by General Garner were security, civil service pay, police training, restoration of basic services, food and fuel distribution, disease prevention, and installation of town councils and provincial governments.

I am not able to address all these issues. However, from the viewpoint of a humanitarian relief and development agency, I would like to emphasize four relevant recommendations that World Vision considers most pressing in addressing human needs in Iraq.

1. Establish a secure environment for relief and reconstruction. The continuing violence, looting and instability make security the biggest challenge in attempting to meet humanitarian needs. In the northern area where World Vision is working, insecurity prevents us from reaching some areas and serving others. Even in the relative security of Mosul, World Vision is forced to follow procedures such as a two-car convoy at all times. This effectively halves our resources. Just a few weeks ago, fighting in Mosul wounded 18 US soldiers and forced the World Food Program to declare two evacuation days. While World Vision did not leave the city, they were “locked down” and idled.

During the month of July, there had been a series of hostile incidents in Mosul, including a grenade/machine gun fire attack on a World Food Program office; a coalition force humvee attacked, and a sustained 30-minute mortar attack on Mosul airport. As a result of these and other incidents, World Vision has decided to increase its security and relocate the majority of its staff to Amman, Jordan for the period of July 10-20, 2003. Two World Vision staff remain in Mosul.

The insecure situation is compounded by the lack of local Iraqi counterparts with whom to work. Banning all or most former members of the Baath Party -- instead of just the top three or four levels -- means there are very few competent civil servants. Mid-level and lower-level civil servants in totalitarian regimes are rarely fanatical supporters since they see the government’s failings up close. The Coalition Provisional Authority would be wise to reinstate public servants subject to subsequent reviews of their history. Because World Vision typically works with local private and public

partners, we are finding the virtual absence of a functioning civil society a major challenge in operating humanitarian programs.

Our staff in Iraq gives Paul Bremer, administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, credit for moving humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts along faster. Nonetheless, long-term security is proving difficult to obtain. Long-term security will require Iraqi self-reliance, self-rule and an early restoration of sovereignty.

2. Prioritize the needs of children. Half of Iraq's population of 23 million is under the age of 18. Children have suffered the cumulative and catastrophic effects of Saddam Hussein's regime, of sanctions, and of war. One of every four children under the age of five is severely malnourished. One in eight Iraqi children die before the age of five. Nearly a third of all girls and almost 20 percent of boys are not attending primary school. The protection and development of children is the very foundation for the future of Iraq.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions establish the inalienable rights of children to protection, security, identity, nutrition, education, participation and opportunity. In the case of Iraq, high priority should be given to ensuring that children are enrolled in primary education as soon as possible and that no child faces discrimination in access to school. Every effort should be made to preserve official government records that establish children's identity. New documents should be issued to children whose records have been lost, confiscated or destroyed. Girl children require special attention and protection from sexual and physical abuse.

3. Clearly separate humanitarian and military efforts. One of the lessons of the last few years with humanitarian assistance following military operations is that the military and humanitarian NGOs have different comparative advantages. Military objectives and humanitarian objectives are not always compatible and, in fact, can be in conflict. Let's allow soldiers to do their job and aid workers to do theirs. At times, that means that the military needs to establish security so that humanitarian agencies have safe and unimpeded access to people in need. But let's not confuse our roles.

For non-governmental organizations like World Vision to work effectively in post-conflict situations, we must establish a close and trusting relationship with the communities we serve. To do so, we must be seen and known to be impartial and independent of any military.

Confusing humanitarian and military activities carries great risks. Our safety often depends on local perceptions. If we appear partisan, if we play favorites, if our assistance is based on anything other than genuine need, we risk jeopardizing ourselves as well as those whom we seek to assist. If our staff become identified with foreign militaries, we are just as likely to be shot at as armed troops. If we are perceived as having any bias, it must be towards assisting children.

The Iraq situation, in particular, has challenged our commitment to maintain our independence and impartiality. NGOs working in Iraq have been uncomfortable with the degree of influence that the US military has exercised through the Humanitarian Operations Centre (HOC) in Kuwait and the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA). As you know, World Vision and other NGOs providing aid in Iraq drafted a series of principles clarifying what would constitute an unacceptable military control over our provision of humanitarian assistance.

Undue military control is not the only threat to impartial and independent delivery of humanitarian aid. World Vision and other NGOs are also concerned about being used as instruments of government foreign policy. Again, if we fail to maintain our impartiality and our independence, we risk endangering our staff and those whom we assist.

If armed forces or governments insist on jeopardizing the impartiality of aid organizations, there will be less humanitarian space, fewer donations from other countries and many more desperate people whose needs will go unmet.

4. Foster international legitimacy through a leading role for the United Nations. World Vision welcomes steps that have been taken in the past two months to achieve a greater international role in the reconstruction efforts in Iraq. The UN vote lifting sanctions against Iraq, its recognition of the Coalition Provisional Authority as a legitimate interim government, the appointment of Sergio Vieira de Mello as the special representative of the UN Secretary General, and the recent World Economic Forum meeting in Jordan to discuss Iraq's future have been helpful developments toward an assumption of international responsibility for Iraq. Yet World Vision and other international NGOs continue to believe that the United Nations must play a much stronger role in the development of civil society in Iraq. We continue to ask President Bush to let the UN lead humanitarian efforts in Iraq.

UN involvement will help to coordinate agencies, international donors, and local and international NGOs. It will encourage burden sharing by the international community in meeting the needs of the

Iraqi people. It will ensure the impartiality and independence of humanitarian aid in a way that the United States cannot do alone.

This continues to be a critical time for civil society in Iraq. Open, honest, transparent structures must be put in place to encourage maximum citizen participation. A clear and robust role for the UN can help bring Iraqis together to develop the practices and institutions necessary to ensure a free and democratic society. The UN confers legitimacy on the transitional process as it relates to both humanitarian assistance and interim governance. A strong UN role enhances international trust and encourages burden sharing. In ways that no single nation can accomplish, the UN can play a key role in facilitating the emergence of an Iraqi constituent assembly and a new constitution. Our hope is that this constitution will ensure human rights, including freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion, that we hold so dear.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this written testimony on behalf of World Vision to the House Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations.

In closing, I want to reiterate the four issues that World Vision considers most pressing in addressing humanitarian needs in Iraq. Those recommendations are:

1. **Establish a secure environment for relief and reconstruction.**
2. **Prioritize the needs of children.**
3. **Clearly separate humanitarian and military efforts.**
4. **Foster international legitimacy through a leading role for the United Nations.**